
Northwest Colorado Fire Management Unit



Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado State Forestry Service, Moffat County

May 5, 2007

To: NW Colorado Interagency Fire Management Plan Files

Subject: Wildland Fire Use Suspension Areas for 2007 Fire Season

From: Kent E. Walter, Field Manager

After discussions with the Field Office and Fire Management Staff, I have decided to suspend Wildland Fire Use (WFU) activities in the Piceance Basin and the eastern portion of the Skull Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA), White River Field Office. This decision will remain in effect through the 2007 fire season or until rescinded. Maps will be prepared and distributed to show the boundaries of these areas. For the Piceance Basin area, Highway 64 will be the north boundary and Highway 13 will be the east boundary. The south boundary will be the Field Office boundary and the west boundary will be the Cathedral Bluffs and Calamity Ridge following Rio Blanco County Road 103 from the SW corner of the area northward to County Road 24X, then following BLM road 1036 and Monument Gulch to Highway 64. In the Skull Creek WSA, the suspended area will be bounded on the west by the Miller Creek drainage, on the north by the WSA boundary line, on the east by Moffat County Roads 104 and 95, and on the south by Highway 40.

The overriding reason for this decision is that of public and firefighter safety. The rapid expansion of industrial activity (natural gas drilling, oil shale development, and infrastructure construction) has resulted in unprecedented numbers of vehicles and people working and/or traveling in the Piceance Basin. While we are tracking the locations of the active drilling operations, larger construction and powerline projects, and the existing oil shale efforts, many other projects on both BLM and private lands are occurring that we may not have reliable information on. Recently there has also been an increase in dispersed camping in proximity to the projects utilizing large numbers of employees. In the Skull Creek area, the private lands and residences continue to be a concern on the east side of the WSA. Planning for fuels mitigation efforts are being initiated, but could be somewhat limited due to the WSA boundary being common with the private land and the resulting difficulty of implementing mechanical treatments.

The following polygons and acreages will be affected by this suspension. In the Piceance Basin area, the B6-W, B7-W, and B8-W polygons encompass about 99,000 acres (the current Fire Management Plan does not allow for WFU in B polygons). The C5-W and C6-W polygons total about 137,000 acres. The D4-W and D-5W polygons total about 473,000 acres. Approximately 610,000 acres will be removed from WFU consideration in the Piceance Basin area. In the Skull Creek area, about 7,500 acres in the D2-W polygon will be removed from WFU consideration.

I ask that Field Office and Fire Management staff continue to monitor and assess the above-mentioned situations as well as others that may arise on Field Office lands so that we may continue to be responsible in our resource and fire management programs.

Kent E. Walter, Field Manager
White River Field Office